



YCCSA Seminar Series Spring 2017

An interdisciplinary seminar series hosted by the York Centre for Complex System Analysis aimed at researchers from all disciplines

The Complex World of Policy Evaluation

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Computer Science CSE/082&083 at 13:30

Abstract:

The practice of public policy is complex. It's a messy and fuzzy world. Public policy is at the coal-face, the centre of action between government, civil society, private enterprise and the citizenry. Public policy (process, implementation and practice) is complex for three broad reasons. One: the space domain in which public policies operate cuts across different sectors (e.g. food, energy, and health), disciplines (e.g. economics, social science, and natural science), and ideologies (e.g. liberal egalitarian, conservative), encompasses multiple spatial and temporal scales and involves a myriad of different actors (from individuals to national agencies). Two: the institutional and governance processes, mechanisms and arrangements in place that enable the development and delivery of public policy are themselves complex – they comprise multiple interacting parts (e.g. multiple arms of Government, Government-associated agencies and NGOs), are not fixed and are open to change and revision. Three: the interventions (programmes, instruments etc.) that are intended to deliver public policies, instruments that are implemented by people on the ground, are diverse, multidimensional, multi-objective, often delivered by multiple institutions and liable to frequent change and adaptation.

Additional complexity is levied by the fact that all three of these broad areas are subject to political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural constraints. The upshot of all this complexity is that evaluating policy programmes, in other words assessing their effectiveness, not just in terms of their outcomes but also their processes is very difficult. Without involving a deliberate complexity perspective it is extremely challenging to investigate and discern the multiple causal pathways for why a policy (or set of policies) did or did not work and therefore how this or that policy can be improved moving forwards.

Thus, in the first part of the seminar, I will introduce and discuss a new 3 year research council and Government co-funded initiative called CECAN (Centre for the Evaluation of Complexity Across the Nexus): a programme designed to explicitly engage with the complexities of public policy across food-water-energy-environment sectors. I will outline its purpose, highlight some of its current activities and suggest how you can get involved. Following, in the second part of the seminar, I will then turn my attention to focus on one particular complex area of public policy, namely, agriculture. I will discuss how different complexity approaches and methods have been employed in the agricultural sector, specifically where and in what context, and then go on to highlight key knowledge gaps and recommendations for future research directions and policy actions. Finally, in the third part of the seminar, after a break in proceedings, I am throwing the floor open to you. What I propose is breaking into small groups, each focusing on a particular policy, and then, in those groups, thinking how you might use your complexity method expertise and knowledge to shed new light on ways to evaluate that policy in terms of process, implementation and outcomes.

The seminar includes a refreshment break

Ron Cooke Hub is on Heslington East Campus – accessible by free bus services

Nos. 66 and 44 running at frequent intervals from Heslington West.

The YCCSA Seminar room is on the second floor